

# The Czar's Spy

By  
Chevalier William Le Queux

"That's where they found the man who was murdered," explained the servant, who still stood in the doorway.

"I know," I replied. "I was just trying the glasses." Then I put them down, and on turning saw upon the mantelshelf a small, bright-red candlestick, which I took in my hand. It was made, I found, to fit upon the electric table-lamp.

"Miss Muriel was very fond of a red light," explained the young woman; and as I held it I wondered if that light had ever been placed upon the toilet table and the blind drawn up—whether it had ever been used as a warning of danger?

As I expressed a desire to see the young lady's boudoir, the maid Cameron took me down to the luxurious little room where, the first moment I entered, one fact struck me as peculiar. The picture of Elma Heath was no longer there. The photograph had been taken from its frame, and in its place was the portrait of a broad-browed, full-bearded man in a foreign military uniform—a picture that, being soiled and faded, had evidently been placed there to fill the empty frame.

Whose hand had secured that portrait before the Leithcourt's flight? Why, indeed, should I, for the second time, discover the unhappy girl's picture missing?

"Has the gentleman who called on the evening of Mr. Leithcourt's disappearance been back here again since he left the hospital?" I inquired as a sudden idea occurred to me.

"Yes, sir. He called here in a fly on the day he came out, and at his request I took him over the castle. He went into the library, and spent half-an-hour in pacing across it, taking measurements, and examining the big cupboard in which he was found insensible. It was a strange affair, sir," added the young woman, "wasn't it?"

"Very," I replied. "The gentleman might have been in there now had I not gone into the library and found a lot of illustrated papers, which I always put in the cupboard to keep the place tidy, thrown out on the floor. I went to put them back but discovered the door locked. The key I afterwards found in the grate, where Mr. Leithcourt had evidently thrown it, and on opening the door imagine the shock I had when I found the visitor lying doubled up. I, of course, thought he was dead."

"And when he returned here on his recovery, did he question you?"

"Oh, yes. He asked me about the Leithcourts, and especially about Miss Muriel. I believe he's rather sweet on her, by the way he spoke. And really no better or kinder lady ever breathed, I'm sure. We're all very sorry indeed for her."

"But she had nothing to do with the affair."

"Of course not. But she shares in the scandal and disgrace. You should have seen the effect of the news upon the guests when they knew that the Leithcourts had gone. It was a regular pandemonium. They ordered the best champagne out of the cellars and drank it, the men cleared all the cigar boxes, and the women rummaged in the wardrobes until they seemed like a pack of hungry wolves. Everybody went away with their trunks full of the Leithcourt's things. They took whatever they could lay their hands on, and we, the servants, couldn't stop them. I did remonstrate with one lady who was cramming into her trunk two of Miss Muriel's best evening dresses, but she told me to mind my own business and leave the room. One man I saw go away with four of Mr. Leithcourt's guns, and there was a regular squabble in the billiard room over a set of pearl and emerald dress-studs that somebody found in his dressing-room. Crane, the valet, says they tossed for them."

"Disgraceful!" I ejaculated. "Then as soon as the host and hostess had gone, they simply swept through the rooms and cleared them!"

"Yes, sir. They took away all that was valuable. They'd have had the sil-

ver, only Mason had thrown it into the plate chest, all dirty as it was, locked it up and hid the key. The plate was Mr. Gilrae's, you know, sir, and Mason was responsible."

"He acted wisely," I said, surprised at the domestic's story. "Why, the guests acted like a gang of thieves."

"They were, sir. They rushed all over the house like demons let loose, and they even stole some of our things. I lost a silver chain."

"And what did the stranger say when you told him of this?"

"He smiled. It did not seem to surprise him in the least, for after all his visit was the cause of the sudden breaking up of the party, wasn't it?"

"And did you show him over the whole house?" I inquired.

"Yes, sir," responded the servant. "Curiously enough he had with him what seemed to be a large plan of the castle, and as we went from room to room he compared it with his plan. He was here for hours, and told me he wanted to make a thorough examination of the place and didn't want to be disturbed. He also said that he might probably take the place for next season, if he liked it. I think, however, he only told me this because he thought I would be more patient while he took his measurements and made his investigations. He was here from twelve till nearly six o'clock, and went through every room, even up to the turrets."

"He came into this room, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," she responded, with just a slight hesitation, I thought. "This was the room where he stayed the longest. There was a photograph in that frame over there," she added, indicating the frame that had held the picture of Elma Heath, "a portrait of a young lady, which he begged me to give him."

"And you gave it to him?" I cried quickly.

"Well—yes, sir. He begged so hard for it, saying that it was the portrait of a friend of his."

"And he gave you something handsome for it—eh?"

The young woman, whom I knew could not refuse half a sovereign, colored slightly and smiled.

"And who put that picture in its place?" I asked.

"I did, sir. I found it upstairs."

"He didn't tell you who the young lady was, I suppose?"

"No, sir. He only said that that was the only photograph that existed, and that she was dead."

"Dead!" I gasped, staring at her.

"Yes, sir. That was why he was so anxious for the picture."

Elma Heath dead! Could it be true? That sweet-pictured face haunted me as no other face had ever impressed itself upon my memory. It somehow seemed to impel me to endeavor to penetrate the mystery, and yet Hylton Chater had declared that she was dead! I recollected the remarkable letter from Abo, and her own declaration that her end was near. That letter was, she said, the last she should write to her friend. Did Hylton Chater actually possess knowledge of the girl's death? Had he all along been acquainted with her whereabouts? What the young woman told me upset all my plans. If Elma Heath were really dead, then she was beyond discovery, and the truth would be hidden forever.

"After he had put the photograph in his pocket, the gentleman made a most minute search in this room," the domestic went on. "He consulted his plan, took several measurements, and then tapped on the paneling all along this wall, as though he were searching for some hidden cupboard or hiding-place. I looked at the plan, and saw a mark in red ink upon it. He was trying to discover that spot, and was greatly disappointed at not being able to do so. He was in here over an hour, and made a most careful search all around."

"What explanation did he give?"

"He only said, 'If I find what I want, Ann, I shall make you a present of a

ten-pound note.' That naturally made me anxious."

"He made no other remark about the young lady's death?" I inquired anxiously.

"No. Only he sighed, and looked steadily for a long time at the photograph. I saw his lips moving, but his words were inaudible."

"You haven't any idea of the reason why he called upon Mr. Leithcourt, I suppose?"

"From what he said, I've formed my own conclusions," was her answer.

"And what is your opinion?"

"Well, I feel certain that there is, or was, something concealed in this house that he's very anxious to obtain. He came to demand it of Mr. Leithcourt, but what happened in the library we don't know. He, however, believes that Mr. Leithcourt has not taken it away, and that, whatever it may be, it is still hidden here."

## CHAPTER X.

### I SHOW MY HAND.

On my return to London next day I made inquiry at the Admiralty and learned that the Battleship Bulwark was lying at Palermo, therefore I telegraphed to Jack Durnford, and late the same afternoon his reply came at the Cecil—

"Due in London twentieth. Dine with me at club that evening.—Jack."

The twentieth! That meant nearly a month of inactivity. In that time I could cross to Abo, make inquiries there, and ascertain, perhaps, if Elma Heath were actually dead as Chater had declared.

Two facts struck me as remarkable: Baron Oberg was said to be Polish, while the dark-bearded proprietor of the restaurant in Westbourne Grove was also of the same nationality. Then I recollected that pretty little enameled cross that Mackenzie had found in Rannoch Wood, and it suddenly occurred to me that it might possibly be the miniature of one of the European orders of chivalry. In the club library at midnight I found a copy of Cappelletti's *Storia degli Ordini Cavallereschi*, the standard work on the subject, and on searching the illustrations I at length discovered a picture of it. It was a Russian order—the coveted Order of Saint Anne, bestowed by the Czar only upon persons who have rendered eminent services to the state and to the sovereign. One fact was now certain, namely, that the owner of that tiny cross, the small replica of the fine decoration, must be a person of high official standing.

Next day I spent in making inquiries with a view to discovering the house said to be occupied by Leithcourt. As it was not either in the Directory or the Blue Book, I concluded that he had perhaps rented it furnished, and after many inquiries and considerable difficulties I found that such was the fact. He had occupied the house of Lady Heathcote, a few doors from Grosvenor Square, for the previous season, although he had lived there but very little.

Where the fugitives were in hiding I had no idea. I longed to meet Muriel again and tell her what I had discovered, yet it was plain that the trio were concealing themselves from Hylton Chater, whom I supposed to be now back in London.

The autumn days were dull and rainy, and the streets were muddy and unpleasant, as they always are at the fall of the year. Compelled to remain inactive, I idled in the club with the recollection of that pictured face ever before me—the face of the unfortunate girl who wished her last message to be conveyed to Philip Hornby. What, I wondered, was her secret? What was really her fate?

This latter question troubled me until I could bear it no longer. I felt that it was my duty to go to Finland and endeavor to learn something regarding this Baron Oberg and his niece. Frank Hutcheson had written me declaring that

the weather in Leghorn was now perfect, and expressing wonder that I did not return. I was his only English friend, and I knew how dull he was when alone. Even his Majesty's Consuls sometimes suffer from home-sickness, and long for the smell of the London gutters and a glass of homely bitter ale.

But you, my reader, who have lived in a foreign land for any length of time, know well how wearisome becomes the life, however brilliant, and how sweet are the recollections of our dear gray old England with her green fields, her muddy lanes, and the bustling streets of her gray, grimy cities. You have but one "home," and England is still your home, even though you may become the most bigoted of cosmopolitans and may have no opportunity of speaking your native tongue the whole year through.

Duty—the duty of a man who had learned strange facts and knew that a defenseless woman was a victim—called me to Finland. Therefore, with my passport properly vised and my papers all in order, I one night left Hull for Stockholm by the weekly Wilson service. Four days of rough weather in the North Sea and the Baltic brought me to the Swedish capital, whence on the following day I took the small steamer which plies three times a week around the Aland Islands, and then across the Gulf of Bothnia to Korpo, and through the intricate channels and among those low-lying islands to the gray lethargic town of Abo.

It was not the first occasion on which I had trod Russian soil, and I knew too well the annoyances of the bureaucracy. Finland, however, is perhaps the most severely governed of any of the Czar's dominions, and I had my first taste of its stern, relentless officialdom at the moment of landing on the half-deserted quay.

In the wooden passport office the uniformed official, on examining my passport, discovered that at the Russian Consulate-General they had forgotten to date the vise which had been impressed with a rubber stamp. It was signed by the Consul-General, but the date was missing, whereupon the man shook his head and handed back the document curtly, saying in Russian which I understood fairly well, although I spoke badly—

"This is not in order. It must be returned to London and dated before you can proceed."

"But it is not my fault," I protested. "It is the fault of the clerk at the Consulate-General."

"You should have examined it before leaving. You must send it to London, and return to Stockholm by to-night's boat."

"But this is outrageous!" I cried, as he had already taken the papers of a passenger behind me and was looking at them with unconcern.

"Enough!" he exclaimed, glaring at me. "You will return tonight, or if you choose to stay you will be arrested for landing without a passport."

"I shall not go back!" I declared defiantly. "Your Consul-General vised my passport, and I claim, under international law, to be allowed to proceed without hindrance."

"The steamer leaves at six o'clock," he remarked without looking up. "If you are in Abo after that it will be at your own risk."

"I am English, recollect," I said.

"To me it does not matter what or who you are. Your passport, undated, is worthless."

"I shall complain to the Ambassador at Petersburg."

"Your Ambassador does not interest me in the least. He is not Ambassador here in Finland. There is no Czar here."

"Oh! Who is ruler of this country, pray?"

"His Excellency the Governor-General, an official who has love for neither England nor the pigs of English. So recollect that."

"Yes," I said meaningly, "I shall

[Continued on Fourteenth Page]